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Substantive session of 1997

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 22nd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 10 July 1997, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. HENZE (Germany)
(Vice-President)

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GE.97-62835 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (agenda item 1) (continued)

Requests from non-governmental organizations for hearings (E/1997/80/Add.1 and 2)

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to take a decision on the requests for hearings by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with consultative status whose names appeared in documents E/1997/80/Add.1 and 2. If there was no objection, he would take it that the Council agreed to hear those NGOs under the relevant agenda items.

It was so decided.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES:

(a) MAINSTREAMING THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE INTO ALL POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES IN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM (continued) (E/1997/66 and 94, E/1997/NGO/1)

Mr. von BECKH WIDMANSTETTER (Argentina) said that mainstreaming the gender perspective into programming met a need at the national and international levels. At the regional level, the programme of action endorsed by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) as a complement to the medium-term plan for the period 1996/2001 reaffirmed the principle of gender equity as part of an integrated approach to development. At the United Nations level, in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action, all bodies should integrate the gender perspective into their policies and programmes, establish concrete mechanisms and indicators to measure progress achieved and include the necessary resources in their budgets. The Commission on the Status of Women had a fundamental role to play in supporting the other functional commissions and the Council, and the latter was responsible for evaluating the results achieved on an annual basis. That entire process required coordination and appropriate funding.

Ms. DOWDESWELL (Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)) said that women had a major role to play in environmentally sustainable development. Out of an awareness that women's role as guardians and preservers of the environment had been insufficiently recognized, UNEP had set two long-term goals: to ensure that women became full partners in environmental management and to incorporate their particular wisdom into

decision-making for environmental development. Based on those two goals, UNEP had made 10 specific commitments in accordance with the priorities for the advancement of women established at Beijing.

At the internal level, guidelines had been established to ensure that all projects met gender-sensitive criteria and that all UNEP meetings, forums and training activities provided an equal opportunity for women's participation. Recruitment policies had been adjusted to facilitate the hiring of women. The gender focal point for women was a member of the appointments and promotions board, and there were plans to develop a women's roster. Through the performance appraisal system, managers were held accountable for measures taken to implement gender criteria in recruitment and programme planning.

At the level of activities, UNEP encouraged women's participation at all levels of the preparation and implementation of the major conventions negotiated under its aegis. Environmental education and training programmes were centred on women's concerns. An environmental citizenship programme, carried out in cooperation with the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), Consumers International and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), would make it possible to reach women more systematically.

Stricter UNEP controls on chemicals that threatened the health of women and children were planned, and the Convention on Biological Diversity would promote the use of women's traditional knowledge. Those were only two examples of specific UNEP activities aimed at restoring women's proper role in environmental protection.

Mr. GRECU (Romania) said that mainstreaming the gender perspective should be carried out in close coordination with the follow-up to the Beijing Conference and other major United Nations conferences. The Council should provide specific guidance on that matter to its functional and regional commissions and make an annual assessment of their progress in discharging their responsibilities. It could also facilitate the integration of a gender perspective by United Nations entities which dealt with areas traditionally considered "gender-neutral", such as legal matters or political and security questions.

In Romania, democracy had given women new opportunities for wider participation in all aspects of society. Despite problems associated with the

transitional period, important measures had already been taken. In 1996, his Government had established a Department for the Advancement of Women in implementation of commitments made at Beijing. Various projects, chiefly dealing with social protection and targeting older, rural and unemployed women, had been undertaken. The National Plan on Women defined the Government's priorities. At the same time, the Government was working at the intersectoral level to incorporate a gender perspective into the formulation and implementation of all its policies and projects.

That national effort should be supported by international cooperation and assistance in areas such as communication technologies and statistical methodologies on gender-disaggregated data processing.

Romania highly valued its cooperation with the United Nations system and, in particular, the Division for the Advancement of Women. In September 1996, Bucharest had hosted a subregional conference on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition to a substantive gender-related project carried out in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Romania, together with France, China and Chile, was participating in an International Labour Organization (ILO) pilot programme on the promotion of equal opportunities in labour administration. Last, the Department on Women was considering the possibility of setting up a national equal opportunity agency in cooperation with the European Union.

Ms. SOLEDAD ARGUETA (El Salvador) emphasized the important role of the Commission on the Status of Women for the implementation of recommendations on mainstreaming the gender perspective into all elements of the United Nations system. Encouraging results had already been achieved by United Nations activities in El Salvador through the creation of focal points for gender-related issues. However, in order to carry out their mission more effectively, those focal points needed increased resources and the help of support staff. There was also a need to make all staff members, at agency headquarters and in the country or regional offices, aware of the role of women and to strengthen mechanisms for internal monitoring to ensure that that role was given due consideration.

In implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, El Salvador had established a Salvadoran Institute for the Promotion of Women, which had

technical, financial and administrative autonomy. That Institute, which played a catalytic role, included the principal Ministers of State and the official responsible for the protection of human rights as members of its governing board. It was responsible for training and consciousness-raising involving State officials, particularly those responsible for the implementation of development programmes and projects. Barely a year after its establishment, the Institute, which worked in close cooperation with a broad range of national bodies and representatives of civil society, had developed a national policy on women for 1997-1999. An initial analysis had shown that 50 per cent of the planned activities had been, or were in the course of being, carried out.

Her Government hoped that the Council's work would lead to concrete recommendations through which the integration of a gender perspective would become a reality.

Ms. LI Sangu (China) said it was not easy to turn words into action. Taking the gender perspective into consideration would produce concrete results only if there was a clearly articulated political will, which she hoped would be strengthened at the Council's current session. In monitoring integration of the gender perspective, the Council and the functional commissions must work in close cooperation to avoid duplication and strengthen the complementarity of their work. Not only should progress towards that integration be maintained in the economic and social fields, efforts must also be made to introduce it into the so-called "gender-neutral" areas. Last, translation into action of follow-up to the major conferences, particularly the one held at Beijing, would require adequate budgetary resources from the various agencies.

Ms. ZHANG (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that, in a world where flagrant inequalities between the sexes still existed, no development was gender-neutral. In the United Nations system, gender mainstreaming was primarily the responsibility of the senior management, who must be personally involved in implementing that strategy if it was to bear fruit and must be held responsible for taking concrete measures at the planning, programming, budgeting, implementation and evaluation stages. Not only practical measures, but also mentalities and attitudes, must be changed.

She hoped that when the Council met in 1998 to conduct its mid-term review of the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, the United Nations agencies would have more tangible results to present.

The gender focal-point units must be given the means to carry out their mandate, which was to facilitate, not to take sole responsibility for, gender mainstreaming. Their mission should be reflected in their job description and their performance appraised accordingly.

Last, the importance of inter-agency coordination could not be over-emphasized. At the headquarters level, she noted the achievements of the Commission on the Status of Women and, at the country level, that of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and UNDP. The Commission, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and UNIFEM should cooperate more closely and work to further harmonize their strategies.

Ms. KORPI (Finland) said her delegation had been very impressed by the work done, and the results achieved, in mainstreaming the gender perspective into the United Nations system. However, she wondered whether Governments and organizations really understood the idea of mainstreaming and whether they all interpreted it in the same way. There had been much discussion of women's projects and the number of women in higher positions, but less had been said concerning policies to be followed and ways of mainstreaming a gender perspective into those policies. Under those conditions, she wondered how coordination problems could be tackled system-wide. Very interesting efforts had been made to strengthen the system's capacity to deal with that complex task at the theoretical level. Some programmes and organizations had achieved excellent results, but individual efforts were not enough: gender mainstreaming must be institutionalized. As had been often stated, the responsibility for mainstreaming lay at the highest levels of management. While the agencies specializing in gender issues had an important role to play in that regard, Governments also bore a large share of the responsibility.

With regard to accountability, her delegation emphasized the need for methods, tools and indicators which would make possible a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of measures taken and results achieved. The

Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, the Bretton Woods institutions, research centres and Governments had much to accomplish in that area.

Mr. PARSHINKOV (Russian Federation) said that while he approved of the initial measures taken by most of the intergovernmental bodies and United Nations agencies to integrate gender mainstreaming into their policies, he had the impression that there was not yet a common interpretation of mainstreaming. The tendency towards excessive theorizing and the use of a language which was clear only to the initiated had doubtless contributed to that situation. Basically, the idea was that the United Nations should continually bear in mind the goal of equality between men and women in the planning, implementation and evaluation of its activities. That simply meant that, in each case, it was important to establish exactly who would be responsible for including the gender perspective in project agendas, who would be responsible for implementing that programme and who would be accountable for the results of its implementation.

The Secretary-General had set an example by appointing a woman to the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights. If the heads of all the agencies, rather than making more and more recommendations, would follow that example by taking concrete measures to implement the resolutions which had already been adopted, considerably more progress would be made towards achieving the goal which had been set.

It was, of course, important to pursue a theoretical study of the gender perspective, but only from a practical point of view and bearing in mind basic realities and past experience. For example, lessons could be learned from the important work which had already been done by the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Equality Between Women and Men. Last, he emphasized the need for close cooperation with NGOs, particularly women's organizations.

Ms. BRANDSTRUP (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) said that her organization was continuing to mainstream gender into its work. All 24 FAO technical divisions had participated in the development of the Women in Development/Gender Programmes of Action, 1996-2001. Those programmes, which were the basis for the FAO Plan of Action for Women in Development, included achievable targets, strategies for implementation and monitoring indicators.

An interdepartmental committee on women in development had been established in February 1996 to provide policy guidance and facilitate coordination and decision-making on substantive and operational matters related to women in development. In addition, FAO had developed diagnostic and methodological tools and training in order to increase the capacity of its staff to implement policies for the participation of women in development. Since 1993, FAO and others, including ILO and UNDP, had been developing a Socio-economic and Gender Analysis Programme, which was designed to give development professionals the necessary tools to mainstream gender and other socio-economic concerns. Those methods and tools were being systematically presented and explained to staff members.

Last, the World Food Summit had given FAO the opportunity to highlight the importance of women, particularly rural women, with regard to food security.

Ms. BARBERO-BACONNIER (International Organization for Migration (IOM)), noting that women were increasingly subject to migration and particularly vulnerable to the problems associated with it, said it was essential for their specific needs to be taken into consideration from the moment that they decided to migrate until their return home. A number of IOM projects throughout the world had shown that that approach could, in fact, assist and empower migrant women.

Women migrant workers and victims of the traffic in women were two groups which were particularly vulnerable to violence. Prevention and assistance constituted the twofold IOM policy in addressing the traffic in women. Trafficking in migrant women was an issue of extreme urgency. A global seminar on that topic, organized by IOM in 1994, had led to a number of in-depth studies carried out from the sending, transit and receiving country perspectives. One such study had explored the traffic in Philippine women for sexual exploitation in Japan, while earlier studies had focused on Eastern, Central and Western European countries. All those reports had alerted policy-makers to the parameters of the problem and had made concrete recommendations.

Furthermore, IOM was facilitating the return and reintegration of women, particularly Vietnamese and Cambodian, who were victims of the traffic to Thailand and had provided reintegration assistance to nearly 600 Vietnamese

who had returned from China and was finalizing information campaigns in Asia to alert potential migrants to the dangers of trafficking. In South America, it was carrying out activities to empower migrant women to overcome the social and economic barriers which they faced. The mainstreaming of migrant women's reproductive health needs was fundamental. The International Centre for Migration and Health, established in Bosnia under the auspices of IOM and the University of Geneva, had carried out a post-conflict pregnancy outcome study which it hoped could be adapted to the situation in other countries, particularly Angola. In addition, IOM was working to ensure that migrant women could participate as fully as men in its projects and services. An upcoming training course in Bulgaria would be aimed at ensuring a gender balance among migration officials and border guards.

Mainstreaming also meant addressing the internal gender balance policies of international organizations. Women remained under-represented in IOM decision-making positions, despite the organization's policy on equal opportunity and treatment, and IOM had developed a plan of action to correct that imbalance.

Mr. HUSSEIN (Observer for Kenya) said the United Nations had an important role to play in developing and implementing a comprehensive policy programme for mainstreaming the gender perspective into all its activities and assisting Member States to do the same with their development programmes. His delegation called on the Council to recommend to the General Assembly that all its main committees and subsidiary bodies should systematically mainstream the gender perspective into all areas of their work, not only in the economic and social sectors but also into programmes on human rights, humanitarian assistance, disarmament, peace and security, and legal and political matters. His delegation considered it necessary to strengthen the central role of the Commission on the Status of Women and concurred with the recommendation that the Commission should provide input or suggestions to other functional commissions in areas where they might require support and guidance on how to introduce a gender perspective into their work.

His Government was continuing to ensure that women participated in, and benefited equally from, the development process. It was also working to reverse the decline in enrolment and graduation rates, particularly for girls,

and to improve the quality of education at all levels, and was preparing a gender sensitization programme for teachers and education officials in order to promote the education of girls.

Given the increasingly important role of women in the rural sector, his Government had taken measures to redesign extension services to provide rural women with directly relevant and accessible information. It also planned to ensure that women in the small and medium-sized enterprise sectors had access to skill-upgrading training tailored to their specific needs.

The United Nations regional commissions and other subregional structures could play a significant role in helping national institutions to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. The Council should consider reviewing the capacity of the regional commissions in order to strengthen gender mainstreaming into their activities and allow them to help countries to do the same. His delegation recommended that adequate resources should be allocated to women-specific programmes to eliminate poverty. Last, he urged all participants to renew their commitment to implementing the objectives agreed upon in the Beijing Platform for Action and to endeavour to ensure that the current debate led to results which would benefit women throughout the world.

Ms. WAHAB (Observer for Indonesia) said that in order for the United Nations to remain in the vanguard of the struggle for equality, mainstreaming of the gender perspective into all the programmes and policies of its bodies must be made more visible. The drafting by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) of a mission statement for the United Nations system on the advancement and empowerment of women and gender mainstreaming should contribute to incorporating women's concerns into the work of the system. As the Secretary-General had recommended, the Second Committee should apply a gender perspective in its consideration of economic questions, particularly with regard to property alleviation - since 70 per cent of those living in absolute poverty were women - and by the Fifth Committee in order to ensure that adequate human and financial resources were devoted to gender mainstreaming. In order to avoid duplication, her delegation supported the Secretary-General's recommendation that INSTRAW and UNIFEM should submit their annual reports to the Commission on the Status of Women. The role of the Resident Coordinators in developing a coherent approach should be strengthened. Gender mainstreaming, at Headquarters and in the field, would

require better data collection, gender analysis and gender expertise. The Women's Indicators and Statistics database (WISTAT) should be further developed, and follow-up to programmes for women should be streamlined, transparent and pragmatic. While important progress had been made, it was important to build on the lessons learned. As the Secretary-General had recommended, pilot projects should be conducted by various entities in order to assess the impact of mainstreaming on programme output. Memoranda of understanding on gender equality goals should be prepared and shared with a view to developing model agreements.

Ms. ENGELBRECHT (South Africa) said that the perception still persisted that certain technical areas or projects and abstract processes of policy and programme development were gender-neutral. In order to incorporate the gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system, it would be necessary to take concrete measures to set up mechanisms for evaluation of progress made and to report on that progress to the Commission on the Status of Women, the Council and the General Assembly. All United Nations staff, not merely gender experts, should receive basic gender training or improve their existing skills.

If gender mainstreaming was not to remain an ideal, gender concerns must be addressed in setting priorities, allocating resources and identifying types of intervention. Mainstreaming was still lacking in many areas of United Nations activity, notably with regard to legal matters, humanitarian assistance, economic issues and political and security issues such as peacekeeping and conflict resolution. South Africa supported the recommendation that the Council should review the capacity of the regional commissions to strengthen gender mainstreaming in their activities and to promote regional cooperation in that respect. The annual reports of INSTRAW and UNIFEM should be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women; UNIFEM had an important role to play in developing countries, and her delegation requested that its resources should be increased and that a training programme for developing countries should be set up.

Ms. KUPCHYNA (Belarus) said that very interesting ideas had been put forward during the dialogue at the Council's 20th meeting on mainstreaming the gender perspective into all United Nations programmes and policies. If genuine progress was to be made in that regard, it was essential that gender

should be taken into account at all levels and in all areas in developing plans and programmes and in project implementation and assessment. As the Secretary-General had recommended in his report, the General Assembly should direct all its main committees and subsidiary bodies to take gender factors into consideration in their work and the Council's functional commissions should adopt an explicit decision on mainstreaming a gender perspective in their work and indicate the necessary resources and modalities. The Commission on the Status of Women should act as a catalyst, particularly for all decisions concerning security, human rights and legal matters. Many essential aspects of gender mainstreaming had been mentioned by earlier speakers. She, in turn, emphasized the importance of constructive dialogue between the agencies of the United Nations system, national institutions for gender equity and women's NGOs.

Belarus had made it a priority to carry out the activities called for in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and its national plan included specific provisions for improving the status of women. She hoped that the agreed conclusions to be adopted by the Council would reflect some of the Secretary-General's recommendations.

Ms. PAVLIC (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that UNESCO had participated actively in the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality and that its basic approach to gender mainstreaming had been incorporated in the report of the Secretary-General. The work of UNESCO regarding women, girls and gender equality was guided by five resolutions which had been adopted at its General Conference in 1995, immediately after the Fourth World Conference on Women. There were 10 special projects which focused on areas defined in the Beijing Platform for Action. Furthermore, UNESCO had been working to develop gender-sensitive statistics and indicators in areas of its concern and to integrate gender guidelines in the evaluation of its programmes. Gender consciousness training would be provided for UNESCO staff at headquarters and in the field and for the national commissions for cooperation with UNESCO which existed in nearly all its member States. Those efforts should make it possible to achieve better coordination of actions within UNESCO and with its many partners. At the same time, measures were being taken to introduce accountability for mainstreaming.

Over the past few years, the number of women appointed or promoted to professional or high-level posts had increased from about 30 per cent as of 1 January 1990 to about 37 per cent as of 1 January 1997, and UNESCO hoped to improve those results over the next two years. The above-mentioned measures were expected to "de-ghettoize" the women and girls gender dimension of its work in the minds of both men and women, not only among the organization's staff but, even more importantly, among its partners at the country level. That approach would be tested in the preparation of two major international conferences, the World Conference on Higher Education, to be held in 1998, and the World Science Conference, to be held in 1999. Two events might have a significant impact on gender mainstreaming in areas of UNESCO competence: an international campaign to promote women's and girls' right to education as a fundamental human right, to be launched in 1998 in a select number of countries, and a debate on women's unpaid work, based on the report "Our Creative Diversity". Last, the Women and the Culture of Peace Programme explored gender-related factors that thwarted or enhanced the transition from the present "culture of violence" to a culture of peace.

Ms. ASHIPALA-MUSAVYI (Observer for Namibia) said that the Beijing Conference had recognized that the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women had had little effect, in part because gender issues had been considered in isolation. That situation remained virtually unchanged: at the national level, those questions were still considered as women's, rather than national or development, issues, while at the intergovernmental level they were considered as sectoral questions. For Namibia, the goal of mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system was to help eliminate the "feminization of poverty" and its causes.

Her delegation considered that it was more important to strengthen national capacities for operational activities than to appoint women to high-level posts; women's concerns should be integrated into the Council's resolutions in various fields rather than being the subject of specific resolutions. As the African delegations had explained at length at the Beijing Conference, the gender unit of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) did not have the capacity to effectively coordinate gender mainstreaming. That capacity should be strengthened.

With regard to coordination between the Division for the Advancement of Women, INSTRAW and UNIFEM, she endorsed the statement made by the observer for Indonesia: UNIFEM had an important role to play in the empowerment of women, which was essential to their participation on an equal basis with men. That point should, therefore, be clearly made in the agreed conclusions. Gender sensitization was a requirement for all United Nations staff members. After the Beijing Conference, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), for its part, had established a gender equality unit responsible for coordination with the national mechanisms of member States. However, gender balance in the United Nations staff must not take precedence over the principle of equitable geographical distribution. Last, successfully integrated follow-up to major United Nations conferences could be measured only through success at the national level. It was therefore essential that countries should be provided with the resources necessary to that end.

Ms. HERNANDEZ QUESADA (Cuba) said there could be no social, political or economic progress without the elimination, in individual societies and at the international level, of the stereotypes which limited women's participation and equality. While the statistics seemed to suggest a higher level of women's participation, the ideas which had marginalized them for centuries remained. Her delegation attached great importance to the integration of a gender perspective and was therefore following closely the negotiations leading to the Council's agreed conclusions in that regard. While she welcomed the report of the Secretary-General, she thought that it focused too closely on the establishment of general principles and tended to ignore the need to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. With regard to the recruitment of women, she concurred with the representatives who had emphasized the importance of Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations; gender equality was simply an addition to the other principle on which recruitment of United Nations staff should be based, particularly that of the widest possible geographical distribution. She hoped that that criterion would be reaffirmed during the current reform process. Improvement in the living conditions of society as a whole, and therefore of women, was a constant concern of the Cuban Government and people. Despite the difficult conditions resulting from the blockade which had been imposed on Cuba for over 38 years, there had been considerable improvement in the condition of women

there. Over 40 per cent of Cuban workers were women, and they were widely represented in the technical, service, management, education and health sectors. Many of the world's inhabitants were still subject to the daily scourge of poverty. Of the 1.3 billion people living in extreme poverty, 70 per cent were women and girls. That was a disaster which could only be aggravated by neo-liberal prescriptions, and the number of women who had no job, home or right to a decent life was bound to increase. She was struck by the fact that the word "poverty" appeared only once in the draft agreed conclusions, although the Secretary-General's report mentioned the adoption of a gender perspective in the struggle against poverty.

Ms. GUTIERREZ (Observer for the Dominican Republic) said that mainstreaming the gender perspective into all programmes and policies of the United Nations system should seek not only to increase women's participation and training and ensure the equitable distribution of resources, but also to encourage their participation at all levels of decision-making and in programmes and policies devoted to the elimination of poverty worldwide or to the promotion of peace. It was also important to set up a system of evaluation and ongoing monitoring which would make it possible to assess progress in gender mainstreaming.

In that regard, cooperation with NGOs was essential; they must participate more actively in the sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, particularly when it considered follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women. It was also important to strengthen coordination between the various United Nations bodies at the local and regional levels. To that end, the institutional resources of INSTRAW should be increased.

The Secretary-General had recommended that INSTRAW and UNIFEM should report to the Commission on the Status of Women, but it would doubtless be better to reflect further on that idea in view of the upcoming reforms to the United Nations system. However, it would be useful to know what INSTRAW and UNIFEM thought of the idea.

Mr. PERERA (Sri Lanka) said that the Secretary-General's report provided firm guidance for Governments and the United Nations system with regard to gender mainstreaming. Sri Lanka was currently implementing a national plan for the promotion of women which had been established in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Ministry concerned

had set up a series of contact groups which monitored actions undertaken and budgetary allocations. The performance indicators which the United Nations was progressively establishing were certainly very useful.

Mr. ALVAREZ (Observer for Costa Rica) said the Council had received valuable information on progress towards gender equality made by the various programmes and specialized agencies in their respective domains. Considerable progress had also been made in Costa Rica, which had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1984 and, in 1990, had adopted an act aimed at promoting gender equality at the social level. Gender equality in access to education had already been achieved, and there had been clear progress in women's participation in the economic sector. Efforts were currently under way to prepare women for more frequent appointment to senior positions at all levels of administration and corporate management and to provide them with training so that they could participate more actively in all the macroeconomic sectors. In that regard, the General Assembly should recommend additional activities for the promotion of women.

Ms. WILTSHIRE (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that UNDP faced three major challenges in successfully mainstreaming the gender perspective into its policies and programmes.

The first involved establishing partnerships with NGOs and the private sector. The NGOs had, in fact, become extremely competent in gender-related matters. The official UNDP partners were still Governments, and women remained a small minority at the formal decision-making tables. While most Governments were strengthening their partnerships with NGOs and civil society, the UNDP legal system prevented it from doing so. Adjustments had been made at the policy level in order to facilitate that process, but the legal and financial changes had taken far longer than anticipated. It had also been necessary to build capacity in participatory processes, both institutionally and at the national level. Moreover, the entire United Nations system must include civil society and specialized NGOs in its deliberations to a far greater extent than at present.

Globalization had also led UNDP to focus more closely on the private sector, with which it must work to eliminate poverty and empower women. Women leaders already played a role in the private sector and headed many major companies in both North and South.

The second challenge for UNDP was to move from situations of war and crisis to sustainable human development. In the course of its operational activities, UNDP had noted that women often played a pivotal role in the reconstruction and development of countries after a crisis; efforts must therefore be made to include them in negotiations and to take their priorities into account. That would require gender competence on the part of United Nations leadership and the various agencies, and the opportunity provided by changes at the national and global levels must not be lost.

The third challenge to UNDP was the need for budgetary allocations which provided explicitly for gender mainstreaming and for the establishment of mechanisms to monitor expenditures and outcomes.

Ms. HUSKINS (American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)) said she wished to speak on behalf of AARP and the Geneva NGO Committee on the Status of Women, which included some 50 NGOs in consultative status with the Council.

With regard to the promotion of women, in order to move from mere analysis of the problems to action resulting in real change, several areas must be given priority attention.

First, coordination, which was currently inadequate, must be strengthened. Several different functional commissions were responsible for follow-up to the various world conferences, whereas that follow-up should be integrated and go hand in hand with an integrated gender mainstreaming policy. Every opportunity for coordination of mainstreaming must be seized; in that regard, AARP noted that the Secretary-General had recommended in his report that the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission for Social Development should harmonize efforts on behalf of older women in connection with the International Year of Older Persons (1999).

Second, with regard to accountability and targets, the Secretary-General was right in seeking to shift responsibility for implementation to the highest levels of decision-making in the United Nations system.

Third, with regard to capacity-building and cooperation with NGOs, it was encouraging that the Secretary-General had recommended that all staff members should be required to have training in basic gender competence and to be accountable for mainstreaming gender in their assignments. Those were areas where NGOs had acquired significant and successful experience, and they should be given the opportunity to share examples of best practices, as well as lessons learned from less successful efforts, with the United Nations system.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Substantive session of 1997

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 23rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 11 July 1997, at 10 a.m.

President:	Mr. GALUŠKA	(Czech Republic)
later:	Mr. SOMAVIA (Vice-President)	(Chile)

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OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued):

(b) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (continued)

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES (continued):

(b) FRESHWATER, INCLUDING CLEAN AND SAFE WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

GE.97-62838 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued):

(b) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (agenda item 3 (b)) (continued) (E/1997/L.27)

The PRESIDENT invited the observer for the United Republic of Tanzania to introduce draft resolution E/1997/L.27 on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. MWAKAWAGO (Observer for the United Republic of Tanzania), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, introduced draft resolution E/1997/L.27, entitled "Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation: follow-up to policy recommendations of the General Assembly", which he said might serve as a basis for an intergovernmental agreement.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES (continued):

(b) FRESHWATER, INCLUDING CLEAN AND SAFE WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION (agenda item 4 (b)) (E/1997/70)

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to begin its consideration of agenda item 4 (b), which was discussed in the report of the Secretary-General issued as document E/1997/70.

Ms. WALLER-HUNTER (Director, Division for Sustainable Development) said that the report under consideration provided an overview of efforts by the organizations of the United Nations system to coordinate activities relating to water resources. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Water Resources, a subsidiary body of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD), was responsible for coordinating implementation of chapter 18 of Agenda 21, it had participated in the preparation of the comprehensive assessment of the freshwater resources of the world which had been submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session and to the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session.

Despite the progress that had been made, there was a need for further efforts to improve coordination and cooperation. The General Assembly at its special session had stressed the need to generate financial resources at the

national, regional and international levels. The President of the World Bank had estimated that expenditure of some $600 billion would be needed over the next decade in order to cope with the water problems of developing countries. Despite efforts made during the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, the situation of those countries remained alarming. Nearly a third of the world's population lacked a safe water supply, and nearly half had no access to suitable sanitation. At the current rate of progress, it would be impossible to achieve full coverage in most parts of the world in the near future.

Another important issue concerned information management for the sustainable development of water resources since most countries' data in that area were inadequate in quantity and quality. The international community should therefore increase its efforts to strengthen the capacity of developing countries in that regard, and the United Nations organizations should take a leading role in developing an effective global information network for improved monitoring of regional and global issues. Increased attention should be given to contamination from toxic chemicals and, in particular, from persistent organic pollutants.

The relationship between water, land, biodiversity and climate change had become evident. The organizations of the United Nations system, through the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, would establish close working relationships with the secretariats of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In addition, since 80 per cent of the pollution of oceans and coastal areas resulted from the contamination of freshwater resources, an equally close relationship must be established with the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas for implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Sources of Pollution. Consultations between those two subcommittees had already been scheduled for the following month.

Mr. SZÖLLÖSI-NAGY (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), speaking in his capacity as Chairperson of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, said that that body had played an

extremely important role in the preparation of the first comprehensive assessment of the freshwater resources of the world, on the basis of which the General Assembly had recognized at its special session that water would become a major limiting factor in socio-economic development and had requested that the highest priority should be given to the serious freshwater problems that faced many regions, especially in the developing world. The Commission on Sustainable Development would therefore take up that matter at its sixth session in 1998. The ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources was considering the development of a plan of action and specific modalities for organizing its work. It would welcome advice and proposals from members of the Council.

Mr. SCHUMACHER (Luxembourg), speaking on behalf of the European Union, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, said that the report of the Secretary-General showed clearly that since the United Nations Water Conference held at Mar del Plata in 1977, the subject of freshwater supply had become an integral part of the proceedings of various organizations of the United Nations system and that a coherent approach to that issue was still lacking. The European Union would therefore have preferred the Secretary-General to make more specific action-oriented recommendations aimed at eliminating duplication and better defining the division of labour within the system. In all regions of the world, greater demands were being made upon water resources, and insufficient water supply was impeding economic and social development, hindering the struggle against poverty and leading inevitably to the deterioration of the environment. A coordinated approach at the United Nations system level was therefore required. There was a need to strengthen the working relationship between the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Inter-agency Working Group on Water established within the framework of the Secretary-General's Special Initiative for Africa. The role of the Commission on Sustainable Development was also of particular importance, as the General Assembly had confirmed at its recent special session.

Since water supply was already the subject of conflicts of interest in certain regions of the world, an integrated approach must be applied not only to departments which dealt with aspects of development, but also to those

which dealt with political matters. At the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the European Union had proposed the establishment of a long-term framework for implementing sustainable use and integrated management of water resources at the national, regional and international levels. It suggested that the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources should draft a report on increasing coordination within the United Nations system by the end of October 1997; such a report could be of assistance in the detailed work to be done in that area in early 1998 with a view to the possible adoption of an international action programme on the sustainable management of water resources.

Mr. MWAKAWAGO (Observer for the United Republic of Tanzania), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that improvement of water supply and sanitation coverage required not only provision of the requisite resources and technical support, but also political will: most of the needed resources must be supplied from public funds. The Group of 77 and China therefore called on the international community to provide increased resources and technical assistance to developing countries as a means of harnessing water resources for social and economic use. In that regard, he commended the efforts of a number of organizations of the United Nations system and the World Bank, particularly the United Nations Special Initiative for Africa. There was a need for coordination between the different organizations which dealt with water at the national and international levels. The General Assembly at its recent special session had recommended that the issue of freshwater should be discussed in a comprehensive manner with a view to initiating a strategic approach to all aspects of the sustainable use of freshwater for social and economic purposes and that a dialogue on all issues related to freshwater should be organized under the auspices of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixth session in 1998. The intergovernmental process would be fruitful only if the international community was committed to allocating additional financial resources to the achievement of those goals. The Group of 77 and China considered that the Secretary-General's recommendations and proposals should be referred to the Commission on Sustainable Development for comprehensive discussion.

Mr. Yong Shik HWANG (Republic of Korea) said that although freshwater issues had risen to prominence on the international agenda over the

past 25 years, there was still no mechanism for integrated freshwater management and data assessment at the global level. The Republic of Korea shared the concerns expressed by other delegations over freshwater shortages in various regions of the world and was disturbed by the possibility of depletion of those resources and the ongoing decline in water quality.

His delegation called for scrupulous implementation of chapter 18 of Agenda 21. All national programmes should promote an integrated, multi-sectoral approach to water development management which should serve as a catalyst for sustainable social progress and economic growth. It was important to provide financial assistance and technology transfer at the international level in order to facilitate the implementation of those objectives, particularly in developing countries. His delegation welcomed the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities and strongly supported its implementation and international discussions aimed at curtailing seawater pollution caused by persistent organic pollutants. As the Secretary-General had suggested, the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources should strengthen its ties with other United Nations organizations dealing with water issues in order to better reflect the clear links between water resource management and land management, aquatic ecosystem preservation and climate change. There was also a need for closer cooperation between the Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas. Last, his delegation welcomed the intergovernmental dialogue to be launched by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixth session.

Ms. LINN LOCHER (Observer for Switzerland) said that the Sixth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly had made major progress during the month of April: the new International Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses emphasized the important principle of the fair and equitable use of international watercourses and the prohibition on causing major damage to riparian States. Mention of that new Convention should have been included in the Secretary-General's report. The needs and specific situation of each country should be taken into consideration during the development of policies and programmes of action. Switzerland, whose territory included the headwaters of many major rivers, had regulated its relations with its neighbours through a lengthy series of

agreements. Regional cooperation for watershed management was an essential aspect of implementation of sustainable freshwater management. The participants at the First Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, which had recently been held at Helsinki, had decided to encourage implementation of Agenda 21 at the regional level with a view to protecting waters from pollution and eliminating the non-sustainable use thereof.

Switzerland would continue to work with those countries to improve the supply of safe drinking water and set up additional sanitation systems in developing countries, both through programmes of technical assistance that bore in mind the socio-cultural and natural environments and involved users in decision-making and through environmentally friendly technology transfer. She emphasized the importance of an integrated approach to the protection and sustainable management of freshwater. In view of the close links between water and land, particularly with regard to mountains and forests, her Government planned to organize a workshop on watershed management as part of the preparations for the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

Mr. CRUZ de MELLO (Brazil) said the fact that Brazil alone accounted for 8 per cent of the world's freshwater resources was indicative of the importance to that country of effective freshwater management. The country's water resources policy took the river basin as the unit for planning, placed all sectors of use on an equal basis, called for rational pricing policies and emphasized decentralized and participatory management of water resources. At the regional level, Brazil was participating in the inter-American water resource network established by the Organization of American States, and its cooperation with neighbouring States was regulated by various treaties. Several projects were also being carried out through bilateral cooperation.

The Secretary-General had rightly emphasized that there was a growing demand for water supply and sanitation in developing countries, particularly in urban areas. In order to meet those needs, partnerships must be established between the public and private sectors and between national and

local institutions with the understanding that those efforts must be complemented by increased international cooperation. The Council should establish precise guidelines in that respect.

His Government was also working to promote ecologically sustainable agricultural development. Several initiatives had been carried out in rural areas in order to foster change in production techniques as a means of reducing the use of chemicals to improve water quality. Generally speaking, Brazil was giving priority to an integrated approach based on the endogenous development of simple and efficient technologies. However, it required international cooperation in order to improve its techniques of institutional management.

The need for more accurate data on water resources was another issue mentioned in the Secretary-General's report. His delegation suggested that there should be a world-wide data re-assessment and that monitoring of that data would be facilitated by a review of the Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS).

Ms. DOWDESWELL (Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)) said that UNEP had played a critical role in encouraging an environmentally sustainable approach to the conservation of freshwater resources. As a result of the recent special session of the General Assembly, UNEP had decided to reorient its programmes towards an integrated approach to the management and use of water resources based on the concept of the drainage basin. It was developing practical legal, economic and institutional tools and developing an assessment methodology for implementation of international river basin agreements, the goal of which was the preparation of a model agreement for riparian countries.

That integrated approach, which was based on a continuum between freshwater and oceans, had prompted the activities of UNEP as secretariat of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, including negotiations on persistent organic pollutants.

Assessment was another important aspect of UNEP activity. The GEMS water monitoring project, carried out in cooperation with other specialized agencies, was the only such programme in the United Nations system. The UNEP water branch was working with the GEMS centres to improve that programme in

order to make it a more reliable source of information for decision- and policy-making. As one of the three Global Environment Facility (GEF) implementing agencies, UNEP was preparing a proposal for global international water assessment which would be submitted to the GEF council.

Another UNEP leadership area was that of technology development and transfer. The UNEP Water Branch and International Environmental Technology Centre in Japan had cooperated in the identification and analysis of freshwater resource management technology. Regional workshops had been organized and books had been published to disseminate the resulting knowledge.

Within the framework of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, UNEP planned to pay particular attention to small-scale projects carried out in cooperation with the South African Development Community (SADC) with a view to ensuring an equitable and "fair share" approach to water supply issues at the local level.

The economic valuation of water was also of interest to UNEP, which planned to intensify its work on water pricing and subsidies.

Owing to its experience in brokering international environmental agreements, UNEP was uniquely positioned to promote the signing of multilateral agreements on internationally shared watercourses which took account of regional needs.

Water problems involved all sectors and aspects of society, and UNEP planned to promote increased public awareness through its Global Environmental Citizenship Programme. It hoped that the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development would result in consensus on a strategic approach which would encourage the ecologically viable use of water resources by all sectors of society.

Mr. CELEM (Turkey) said his delegation shared the view expressed in the Secretary-General's report that worsening water supply and quality problems were largely the result of poor resource management. If nothing was done to impose more effective management of those resources, many countries, including Turkey, would experience significant water deficits over the next 25 years. A holistic and comprehensive approach to land and water resources development was therefore more necessary than ever.

All countries, particularly developing ones, must integrate sustainable development considerations into their agricultural policy analysis and

planning. There was also a need to promote the use of modern irrigation methods, which wasted less water than primitive methods. In order to prevent waste, domestic policies for water utilization should be reviewed and, in particular, consideration should be given to a rational water pricing system. Public awareness campaigns would doubtless also be useful.

Another useful measure was the treatment and reuse of waste water; however, given the cost of installation, international financial support for such projects was needed at the national and regional levels. Harmonized information systems, which were essential to the integrated assessment and management of water resources, could be implemented only if developing countries first established national information systems in preparation for the creation of data banks.

His delegation supported efforts to streamline the programmes and activities of the United Nations bodies which dealt with water resources along the lines of their respective mandates. Without denying the complexity and multidimensional nature of the water resources issue, he emphasized the need to classify problems in order to avoid rendering international cooperation more difficult.

In order to narrow the gap between developed and developing countries in the area of water resources development, there was a need for strengthened regional and international cooperation for technology transfer and the financing of projects such as those called for by the Global Water Partnership, the costs of which would clearly exceed the financial capabilities of most developing countries.

Mr. CHRISTOFIDES (South Africa) said that if the current trends in water use and population growth continued, South Africa would experience a freshwater shortage during the first half of the twenty-first century. To offset those problems, the Government had adopted a strategy aimed at giving the entire population access to water while encouraging it to preserve that precious resource. A broad campaign had been launched with a view to meeting basic needs of water supply and sanitation at the grassroots level. Over 1,000 projects targeting 4 million people, primarily in the poverty-stricken marginal areas of the country, had been undertaken. A major programme of health and hygiene education had also been launched at the community level with the close cooperation of women.

The new national water policy had made changes in the legislation governing water ownership and guaranteed the right of all citizens to basic services. Several measures had been taken to raise public awareness of the need for responsible use and management of water resources with respect for equity and the public interest.

At the regional level, South Africa had participated in shared water resource projects with neighbouring States for many years. Various agreements had been signed, particularly with the Governments of Swaziland and Lesotho. The South African Development Community Protocol on Shared Water Course Systems was an important initiative for the equitable division of resources between the countries of the sub-continent.

The success of all those efforts would depend on technical and financial assistance from the United Nations system, particularly with regard to capacity-building. Specific recommendations and time frames should be provided in order to streamline the activities of the different bodies. Lastly, with regard to the recommendation made in paragraph 42 of the Secretary-General's report, his delegation preferred to support phased, gradual introduction of water pricing in the developing world.

Mr. PRENDERGAST (Jamaica) said his delegation concurred with the Secretary-General's recommendation of a more comprehensive approach to the examination of water resources, bearing in mind the constraints faced by developing countries and the need to strengthen international cooperation in order to address those problems. The recommendations which had resulted from from the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, which provided an opportunity to build on chapter 18 of Agenda 21 in the areas of capacity-building, human resource development and scientific and technical advances, should serve as a basis for such international cooperation.

Jamaica, like other small island developing States, had to contend with serious water and sanitation problems generated by changes in the pattern of rainfall and the impact of climate change on the hydrological cycle. It therefore looked forward to the comprehensive assessment of freshwater resources which would take place at the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1998 and hoped that discussions would include the need for strengthened capacities for monitoring water quality, increased investment in projects designed in cooperation with local communities and, in

particular, with women, and aimed at facilitating access to safe water and sanitation, integrated management of water resources and implementation of policies focused on the protection of watersheds and water basins. He hoped that that session of the Commission would lead to action-oriented measures and to an attempt to build an overall strategic approach to ecologically sustainable management of freshwater resources.

Mr. KAABACHI (Tunisia) noted that implementation of the large-scale sanitation policies necessary to sustainable improvement in the water supply often exceeded the financial capacities of developing countries and that the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session had emphasized that the international community must demonstrate its commitment to providing additional funding to guarantee safe drinking water and a sanitary environment for all. To that end, the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, should provide technical and financial support to developing countries with a view to the preparation of strategies for sustainable water management and national plans for promoting water management techniques. The Commission had also appealed to developed countries to strengthen regional and international cooperation for technology transfer and funding of comprehensive programmes. The international conference on safe drinking water resources, to be organized by France in 1998, would provide an opportunity to take the necessary decisions in that regard.

Tunisia had developed a master plan for rational management of the country's water resources which would guarantee effective, balanced distribution of the various uses of water. Many small-scale construction projects had been undertaken in order to raise the water table and meet the growing needs of rapidly expanding agriculture. The Government had also worked to protect the oases in the south of the country, which were at risk of desertification, through new irrigation techniques. The development of industry and tourism, both of which involved major freshwater consumption, posed a serious threat to agriculture by drawing off water resources. Tunisia had attempted to solve that problem in several ways, including the recycling of water so that it could be reused for irrigation. However, the Tunisians were aware that lasting improvement in the water supply would require a solution to other related problems and had therefore implemented a comprehensive programme, within the framework of sustainable management of

human settlements, which had already made it possible to implement several sanitation projects and to set up some 50 sewage analysis laboratories. A major groundwater desalination programme had also been undertaken in the arid regions in the south of the country.

Within the framework of the national programme for the development of isolated rural areas, a national solidarity fund, financed through voluntary contributions, had been established in order to, inter alia, ensure that the poor had access to safe drinking water and to provide sanitation to the communities in which they lived. Last, the Government had established the Tunisian Environment and Development Observatory, an ongoing system for the collection, production, analysis and dissemination of information on the state of the environment in Tunisia.

Mr. JARRAUD (World Meteorological Association (WMO)) said that water use had increased by a factor of 6 between 1900 and 1995, more than double the rate of population growth during the same period, a fact which explained the increased competition for water for agricultural, domestic and industrial purposes. That situation was further aggravated by irregular rainfall and by floods and droughts, both of which affected the supply of clean and safe freshwater for domestic use. Furthermore, in the longer term, the projected climate change might modify rainfall distribution patterns with serious consequences for regional water resources, as stated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The need for quantitatively and qualitatively reliable information on freshwater resources and their management, particularly in urban areas, had been emphasized at HABITAT II (1996), and, more recently, by the United Nations General Assembly at its special session on the review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the water resources available in the world, WMO, at the request of the Commission on Sustainable Development and in cooperation with United Nations agencies, particularly UNESCO, had recently undertaken a comprehensive assessment of the freshwater resources of the world. The assessment had confirmed that if current trends continued, two thirds of the world's population might experience moderate to high water stress by the year 2025. Furthermore, the General Assembly had recently called for the strengthening of the data collection capabilities of

Governments and international institutions in order to facilitate the assessment and management of water resources and the exchange of hydrological information. It was therefore imperative to strengthen local networks for the acquisition and collection of hydrological data, which were deteriorating in many countries.

In view of its mandate to assist Governments in addressing water-related issues, WMO had initiated the World Hydrological Cycle Observing System (WHYCOS), which was being implemented by stages in various parts of the world with the assistance of the World Bank, the European Union and various regional institutions in order to strengthen national and regional water resource assessment capabilities. At the regional level, WMO had also organized two water assessment conferences, one at Addis Ababa in 1995 and the other in Costa Rica in 1996. A third such conference was scheduled to take place in Asia in 1997 or early 1998. The purpose of those conferences was to strengthen the capacities of developing countries through the pooling of human and financial resources.

Since women had been increasingly involved in the planning and implementation of water-related projects and programmes, particularly in developing countries, they should be encouraged to play a greater role in water and sanitation schemes at the community level. National development plans should therefore place greater emphasis on strengthening their capabilities.

Within the framework of the United Nations system, the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources was the mechanism which should be strengthened so that it could help the international community to solve the major problems of the future.

Mr. Somavía (Chile) took the Chair.

Mr. WIJKMAN (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that the work done by UNDP in four essential areas (deforestation, sustainable development, food security and water) showed how important it was to include environmental concerns in the struggle against poverty and emphasized the interdependence between water and food and between energy and forests.

Because of its multisectoral approach, UNDP was in a position to respond to the major challenges presented by the water crisis. Integrated management of water resources was essential and should include all such resources. It

had been about a year since UNDP had introduced a new integrated strategy for water resource management. An essential aspect of that question was demand management, in other words, the need to set prices which corresponded to the real value of water. That presupposed the elimination of all subsidies, which were often counter-productive. Of course, local conditions and the situation of the very poor must be taken into account and funding must be provided.

There was a need to establish mechanisms to strengthen cooperation at all levels. The Global Water Partnership had been created with that goal in mind. The ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources would also have a key role to play over the next few years in implementing the programmes which had been adopted. The United Nations agencies should serve as catalysts by fostering capacity-building and facilitating contact between the private and public sectors. Recently, UNDP had set up a special programme to encourage partnerships between the public and private sectors, particularly in the areas of waste and water management. Water was specifically mentioned in over two thirds of its country programmes for 1997-1999, which meant that all of those programmes would benefit from the progress made within the framework of the global partnership.

He emphasized the importance of good water resource management for the elimination of poverty since health and food were heavily dependent on those resources. Water could no longer be taken for granted, and food security would become a major problem in the coming years. Unless a way was found to solve the water crisis, there would be an increase in tension and conflict concerning access to that essential resource, and the struggle against poverty would fail. Therefore, UNDP was determined to increase its activities on behalf of integrated water resource management.

Mr. WINNICK (United States of America) said that water was the primary indispensable resource and that the current situation, in which rising demands were increasingly exceeding supply and quality was increasingly threatened, could not continue. The international community had recognized the problem, and it was time to seek solutions. The United States therefore supported the Commission on Sustainable Development's recommendation that the highest priority should be given to the freshwater problems facing the world. The formulation of concerted approaches would require cooperation among Governments and coordination of the activities of international organizations,

scientific and research institutes and the private sector. He therefore welcomed recommendations aimed at strengthening coordination and cooperation. At the Group of Eight (G8) Summit held at Denver, participants had pledged to improve coordination of efforts in the area of freshwater and to promote bilateral and regional cooperation in that regard.

The Commission on Sustainable Development could and should play a central role in developing programmes and policies to provide safe drinking water to the world's population and to reduce international tensions on water issues. The agenda for the Commission's sixth session should be carefully considered with a view to building on the knowledge already acquired without duplicating past efforts.

The United States believed that water supply and sanitation issues were most effectively addressed at the local, national and subregional levels. It endorsed the recommendation that the United Nations should intensify its assistance to national efforts to build up needed expertise among water users and decision-makers at all levels. The United Nations system should also play a role in helping countries to develop national strategies and policies to promote, among other things, efficient water use.

Improved coordination of field activities should be a priority for all resident coordinators. Ensuring an effective allocation of financial resources was also important and could be achieved through gradual implementation of appropriate pricing policies. His delegation was convinced that the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources would prove capable of playing its important role, supported the establishment of close links between the respective secretariats, the Subcommittee and organizations and believed that the streamlining efforts undertaken by the Secretary-General would conserve resources and reduce duplication.

Mr. GARCIA MORITAN (Argentina) said that Argentina had long been aware of the importance of the quality of drinking water and the protection of basins and had therefore adopted a strict national policy which included the construction and installation of water treatment plants, the installation of meters, the establishment of management committees and appeals to the public.

The United Nations bodies, particularly UNEP, UNESCO, the World Health Organization (WHO) and WMO, under the coordination of the Commission on Sustainable Development, together with international financial institutions,

should continue to provide technical and financial assistance to help countries evaluate their water resources. It was also important to set up institutional and financial mechanisms which would allow countries to benefit from activities carried out, not only with regard to water resources, but also under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The activities undertaken should have the following focuses: evaluation of surface and groundwater resources from the quantitative and qualitative points of view, development of master plans for management of water resources at the level of individual countries and that of basins, and establishment of mechanisms for coordinating the activities of agencies in the United Nations system in order to extend their cooperation to include various national bodies concerned with water resources. Contact must also be maintained between hydrologists and public and private decision-makers, all of whom must be made well aware of the increasingly important role played by water, and greater emphasis must be placed on training through the inclusion of water-related issues in curriculums at all levels of education and the organization of major public information campaigns. High priority in resource allocation must be given to United Nations agency programmes and, at the country level, there should be wider dissemination of those programmes and of the conclusions of inter-agency bodies and the documentation resulting from their work.

Mr. A.K. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that, while water was not new to the global agenda, it had taken on critical importance, as emphasized by the General Assembly at its recent special session. The challenges which it presented, particularly to developing countries, were enormous. The ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources seemed to be duly seized of the matter; his delegation asked to be updated on its work and wondered how the Subcommittee perceived the effectiveness of coordination of United Nations bodies at the country level with regard to the application of integrated approaches to the development, management and use of water resources.

Except for finalization of a consensus document (of which, moreover, his delegation would like to obtain a copy), the Inter-agency Steering Committee for Water Supply and Sanitation did not really seem to have begun its coordinated action. His Government believed that greater coordination was

required, particularly with regard to water resources assessment and protection of water quality. He asked what action the United Nations system was taking to remedy the problem of arsenic pollution of drinking water in Bangladesh, a problem which affected the daily lives of hundreds and thousands of people in the south-west of that country, as well as parts of India and China, and which had a potential degenerative impact on millions of young and unborn children. His delegation also wondered what action was being taken by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which was closely involved in water supply programmes in those countries. It was essential for the United Nations system to announce a coordinated programme to address that problem, and it would be worth setting up an early warning system on drinking water pollution.

He emphasized the importance of capacity-building for sustainable water resource management in developing and, in particular, the least developed countries and welcomed the fact that the First World Water Forum had been held with a central theme of "Water resources management in the next century". As the theme of the 1998 World Day for Water would be "Groundwater", it would be necessary to determine the best means of ensuring sustainable development and management of groundwater resources. The United Nations system should assist the developing countries to organize meaningfully the observance of that Day. His delegation supported the establishment of a global water information network and believed that all organizations of the United Nations system which dealt with water resources should join the Global Water Partnership and that the World Water Council and the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council should harmonize their work to support national efforts. Furthermore, all the relevant organizations of the United Nations system should be fully involved in preparations for the UNESCO conference on global water resources to be held in June 1998. Last, the Commission on Sustainable Development should examine the role of the private sector when it considered the question of freshwater management at its sixth session.

Mr. KREISEL (World Health Organization (WHO)) said that access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation was a vital necessity, the lack of which continued to result in millions of deaths per year among children with diarrhoeal diseases and over 200,000 deaths per year from schistosomiasis. Yet those diseases could be prevented through the use of molluscicides,

reservoir management and health education. Unfortunately, intervention took place only after the appearance of public health problems related to water supply, whereas disease control and health protection should be a primary purpose of water resource development. Unfortunately, human health was a lower priority than in the past; social and health concerns were receiving less attention than environmental economics and cost recovery.

Nevertheless, WHO continued to place health-related concerns at the heart of all its water and environment programmes. For example, it served as the secretariat for the Africa 2000 network, which was an initiative launched by all the States of sub-Saharan Africa with a view to accelerating water supply and sanitation development in the region. It also updated periodically its Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality, which were intended to assist Governments in establishing safe levels of consumption for potentially hazardous water constituents. In that regard, he informed the representative of Bangladesh that WHO had already held a workshop in India on the problem of arsenic in drinking water. In addition, WHO served as the secretariat for the WHO/(Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) (FAO)/UNEP/HABITAT Panel of Experts on Environmental Management for Vector Control (PEEM), which, for the last 15 years, had been highlighting vector-related health issues in water resources development. One of the main features of WHO programmes was their interorganizational nature, and WHO was prepared to cooperate with all other organizations willing to consider the health aspects of water development.

Ms. BAI Yongjie (China) said that the report of the Secretary-General was an excellent basis for Council discussion. It clearly demonstrated the growing gap between the demand for, and the world supply of, freshwater, which might soon become a serious barrier to worldwide economic and social development unless the international community acted quickly.

The specific measures taken to date were insufficient. First, there must be more active cooperation between United Nations institutions and bodies, which must adopt a global strategy for the protection and use of water resources. Since developing countries still lacked capacities with regard to the assessment, management and rational use of those resources, it was urgent that the commitments which had already been made in that regard but which, generally speaking, had remained a dead letter, should be fulfilled as a

condition for any effective action. Second, coordination must be established between agencies of the United Nations system and Governments, which must henceforth integrate drinking water supply and sanitation issues into their national development plans. Third, within the framework of the United Nations system, there must be increased coordination with ACC with a view to determining a clear division of work. In particular, closer links should be established between the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources and the secretariats of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Her delegation welcomed the General Assembly's decision at its nineteenth special session to give high priority to freshwater and sanitation and hoped that the anticipated dialogue would take place.

Mr. SFEIR-YOUNIS (World Bank) said that the World Bank fully agreed with the Secretary-General, who had stated in his report that there was a new consensus on water management through partnership and collaboration. The Bank's policy and strategy in that area were founded on the "Dublin principles", enunciated in 1992 and incorporated in Agenda 21, which were the following: freshwater was a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustained life, development and the environment; water development and management should be based on a common approach involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels; women could play a central role in the provision, management and safeguarding of water; and water had an economic value and should be recognized as an economic good. Those principles required a consideration of existing analytical and planning frameworks, institutional and regulatory frameworks, incentive structures, water-conserving technologies, distribution systems and stakeholders' participation, environmental protection, human resources development and development implementation issues.

He highlighted two examples of cooperation between the Bank and the agencies represented at the day's meeting. The first was the Global Water Partnership, which was an international mechanism whose primary objectives were to support integrated water resources management programmes and to encourage Governments, aid agencies and other stakeholders to adopt consistent, complementary policies and programmes. The Bank considered that

the Partnership had been unacceptably slow in translating the principles articulated at Dublin and elsewhere into practice.

The second example was that of strategy and partnership, particularly with regard to water resources in sub-Saharan Africa. That strategy had been discussed at two technical workshops held at Nairobi and Dakar in February 1996. The participants, among whom had been representatives of the United Nations, bilateral donors, ministers, NGOs and the private sector, had supported five priorities: to enhance service coverage, giving priority to the poor; to ensure food security through irrigation and water harvesting; to improve water quality and human health; to protect watersheds and wetlands; and to establish inter-country river basin cooperation. Implementation of such a strategy would require better donor coordination. However, donors could build on existing frameworks such as the Pan-African Partnership or the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/World Bank Water Supply and Sanitation Programme. An informal working group on water was currently developing a coordinated plan of action within the framework of the United Nations Special Initiative for Africa.

Mr. KASRI (Observer for Indonesia) said that the increasing degradation of water resources was hindering access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation for a considerable part of the world's population. That crisis therefore threatened not only economic development, but the very survival of humanity.

There was no doubt that the United Nations system had made progress since the late 1980s in increasing global awareness of the growing crisis. Many intergovernmental bodies and organizations of the United Nations system, particularly the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session, had established a comprehensive assessment of world freshwater resources.

The Council should follow up on that assessment by giving priority to the freshwater problems with which many regions were already faced. It should also support the idea of organizing a dialogue at the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in an attempt to develop a strategy for sustainable use of freshwater resources. His delegation had high hopes of such a dialogue. It was also important that the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade should be fully implemented. If such an

initiative was to be successful, the international community must provide additional financial resources, as the Commission on Sustainable Development had recommended.

While the first priority must be to meet basic needs for safe drinking water and sanitation, developing countries also badly needed freshwater for agricultural irrigation, industrial development and hydroelectric generation. Because of the complexity of the issue, the fact that a certain amount of progress had been made in implementing Agenda 21 had not halted the drift towards crisis, and a more comprehensive approach was needed. It was also important to address duplication in the activities of organizations in the United Nations system and to attempt to streamline those activities.

One major obstacle to implementation of Agenda 21 was the lack of expertise and of national and human capacities. The Secretary-General had therefore rightly stated in his report that the United Nations system could continue to provide technical and financial support to national efforts to develop, among others, sustainable water strategies that addressed basic human needs and preservation of ecosystems. However, in addition, national and human capacity-building were imperative in order to ensure stability.

Poor countries were at risk of further marginalization as water resources became increasingly scarce and became subject to more intense competition. Policies and programmes aimed at ensuring equitable access to freshwater should therefore accompany regional and international cooperation. At the same time, it was important to create an enabling environment for investment in that area.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.